

Western MRS Meeting Notes  
June 27, 2007  
St. Johns Episcopal Church, Asheville

Counties Present: Buncombe, Cherokee, Jackson, Iredell, McDowell, Rutherford, Swain, Wilkes, Yancey

Introductions

News from Raleigh

Automation

MRS Institute Review

Recap Policy Discussion

Substance Abuse

When, How, Who

Tools

News from Raleigh

Evaluation Issues

- Heather asked people to be on the lookout for a Dear County Director letter next week regarding data collection around Social Worker visits with Children in Foster Care.
- There is a federal mandate that we track these visits and how many of them take place in the child's residence.
- The decision has been made to track this through the MRS database. We will want it on all children in care as of July 1 of this year. This may require that counties go back and enter some older 210 information since the system will not allow 109 data to be entered for children until after the 210 information is entered.
- In addition to the DCD there will be an Administrative Letter that deals with this and the other recent updates to the MRS database. For more information after reading the letter they can contact Heather.

Personnel Changes within the Division

- Supervisor of Community Based Programs = Marina Chatoo (formerly Charisse Johnson)
- Supervisor of Adoptions/Foster Care team = Paul Waddle (formerly Esther High)
- Local Operations = Kevin Kelley (formerly David Atkinson)

MRS Institute – August 27-29 Asheville

- Hoping to have the brochure and registration come out by July 6.
- There will be sessions on Shared Parenting and Maintaining Connections in Foster Care, Cultural Diversity, Coaching Families, Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence (one of which will deal with how to work with offenders), Case Plans (how to develop them in CFTs) and how to use them with families, engagement: community partners, families, and staff, Combined WF and CPS case plans, relative care and working with relative caregivers, WF 101 for CPS workers, CPS 101 for WF workers, WF and CPS collaboration, working on an ethics presentation, Documentation, one from a county talking about how they implemented DV policy, Financial Social Work (talking to CPS families about money issues).

- Day long seminars on Latino simulation, Collaboration b/w CPS and WF, Poverty simulation, CFTs.
- From DSS staff trainers: Solution focused therapy, SOC, True Colors (Joanne Scaturro), Humor in the Workplace.
- George Duvall – former foster child that will do a session on fatherhood.
- Quan Bryant – presented at the WF Conference.
- John Formica – time and stress management.
- These will be presented by Staff Development, Counties, University Partners, and nationally known speakers.

#### Recap of Policy Discussion from last month

Last month we talked about a lot of policy. When we rolled MRS into Chapter 8 and realized there were some areas there were some areas that needed clarification. Asked people for input at all three meetings last month. The following is a summary of the meetings as a whole. (New conversations from this meeting also included.)

When we seek input at these meetings, Holly writes a summary of the discussion and the policy team will take it into account when they discuss

#### Stopping Family Assessments

- The biggest thing that came out of this was that this was a policy that was very rarely used.
- Doing a good job at intake is important; it was possible that this policy was used in circumstances where if intake were tighter the report would not have been accepted in the first place.
- Discussed back and forth reporting from separated and divorcing parents. Some counties have used CFTs to deal with this because the policy is not appropriate for these types of reports.
- Question about would you complete a 5104 and Case Decision Summary if you stopped the assessment.
- Felt that using this did not give a family closure.
- Hard to feel 100% confident that it was ok to use this policy.

#### CFTs – is the policy clear? Is it enough?

- Perhaps some policy on how to document (counties say they are doing them but we do not see documentation of them.)
- Need to include CFT information in Foster Care policy.
- Need to strengthen the policy about actually doing the service plan at the CFT.
- When it is appropriate to collapse CFT and P-PAT.
- Pre-petition CFT – would this place children at risk – want to make sure that we protect children but don't have policy that allows staff to claim a safety threat and therefore not hold CFT.

#### CFSR issues

- 210 policy is clear that you have to contact the father during the assessment, but it is not clear what has to happen after that. At the CFSR the feds were clear that they expected him to be involved throughout the case. Or at least for the DSS to make every reasonable effort to include him or his family.

- At all three meetings someone said that we would put mom in danger if we involved dad. There are certainly cases where that is true, but most of the time there is evidence already existing that he is dangerous if that is the case (police reports, etc). If it is true, document it, but we need to be sure that we are not using this as an excuse not to involve the other parent. Custodial parents may have their own agenda in not wanting the other parent involved.
- Even though the absent parent themselves may not be an appropriate placement, but some of the their extended family may be. Don't overlook these resources.

#### Shared Parenting

- First thing that needs to happen is to get this into Chapter 4 because it is not there yet.
- Since this meeting is supposed to happen within 7 days, usually the assessor or 215 worker still has the case because they are not always transferred that fast.
- Blended teams was pointed out as a good strategy for dealing with this issue so that the foster care worker had already been hearing about these cases so it was not brand new to them when the child came into care. Also, since the mindset of blended teams is that they cover for each other, the parent may have seen the foster care worker at some point in the life of the case management (foster care worker may have done a home visit to cover for the case management worker or something like that)

#### Services Recommended

- Really need clarification with which cases are Recommended and which ones are Provided
- Need clarification what to call it if you are recommending that they continue a service that was already in place.
  - Asked what people would do here? Most people said they would make it Services Recommended and one said it was No Services because the family was already doing it, so it was not a recommendation of DSS. However one county said they were not comfortable with that because No Services might imply that DSS did not think they needed counseling. Kept it in the record that they recommended it.
- Clarification on the 7 day visit – how are they getting the services you recommended? CFSR said we might need to help and support them a little to get those services in place. Need to document what you did when you talked with the family about the services.

#### New Discussion at this Meeting

- Feel that if you are using best practice you would not have to make a 7 day visit for a Services Recommended case. If you have been talking to the family throughout the assessment about services there is no need to go back and make a visit just to say “lets talk about those services that we already talked about” but you need to document this really well and make sure that the family is informed about these services and doesn't really need some help accessing them.

## Safe Surrender

- All of the ads imply that there will be no repercussions but the difference is *legal* repercussions, we will still do TPR. Just because they don't *have* to give their name does not mean we won't ask.
- Probably need to clarify to what extent we will go to find out who the parents are.

## Re-examining the Risk Assessment tools

- We are doing this but it is a slow process.
- Looking at what it would take to have a set of risk assessment tools done specifically for North Carolina.

## New Discussion at this Meeting

- The Permanency Planning forms are not useful now that we are doing CFTs – there is a lot of duplication.
- These are federal forms, and we have little control over this. However, have some county folks highlight where there is duplication and we can have the Foster Care folks look at that and see if any changes are possible.

## Substance Abuse Issues

You have to report where an issue is substance abuse. What do we do, when do we ask parents to take drug screens, and to use substance abuse assessments – what triggers that?

- Foster Care worker say she does it when the judge orders it. They have a MH worker in their office who can do the assessments on the treatment cases but she says she cannot do it on the Foster Care cases – they aren't sure why not.
- If the parent admits that they use drugs to a level that affects the children the worker will ask them to complete assessments. Also if they appear to be high.
- Its really up to the judgment of the social worker – based on what they see when they are doing an assessment.
- Some folks here are doing tests on hair samples.
- Holly said that the feeling is that we are doing too many of these – using them as a CYA tool. Some counties agree that it is a CYA issue. We have to make sure that there is a reason we are asking for these tests/assessments and document why we decided to send them.
- Drug use does not equal child neglect and people need to understand that! We are not the moral police, or law enforcement.
- Only truly our concern if it is can be shown that the level of the substance use is affecting the safety of the children
- What makes it affect the safety of the child?
  - Lack of supervision
  - Not getting children to school
  - Inability to pay basic expenses because using money for drugs
- If the case plan includes an agreement that the parent will submit to random drug screens does that mean whenever DSS wants, or only when the social worker sees something in the home or suspicious behavior is seen/reported.
  - Most counties do it when there is some sort of indicator.
- What if child is not in the home, so there is no risk to them, but mom is not showing up for visits, and her behavior is suspicious?

- Some judges put this in every case plan. Some GALs also go overboard with requesting drug testing because they don't understand that all drug use does not create safety issues with children. This costs money for DSS and is not productive to the resolution of the CPS issues.
- Counties would like the DSS county attorneys attend the trainings that social workers attend so that they would know the same things SW do. Would also like to include judges and GALs.
- Would like to have some county attorneys come to these meetings. Possible agenda item in the fall.
- Non Offending Parent – do we test them? Why would we? There has to be an indication that not only does that parent use, but that the use affects the child. Can't just test them because you are testing the other parent.
  - Example: Report that parent is smoking a joint in front of a 5 year old. Child is well behaved and does not appear to have any well being issues but can describe a nickel bag. Is this a report? People said it would be a report, but unless there were additional issues would not be a substantiation.
  - Look at the entire situation. One county had a report where there was a drug bust, Dad appeared to be selling cocaine and marijuana but mom said she did not know and she took the children and left the home. Dad is now in jail and they unsubstantiated because even if he was selling, there was no evidence that the children were ever at harm.
- Can we not just report some things to law enforcement and not even accept a referral if there is no impact on a child? Yes.

### Tools

- Two years ago we made a CD that was compiled of tools that counties provided. We cannot put them on the MRS website, but the Director's Association will put the on their website.
- Want to update this information on the Director's Association website.
- Directors Association website = [www.ncacdss.org](http://www.ncacdss.org)
- Some of the things people have asked Holly for:
  - CFT brochure, checklist for documentation
  - WF referral form
  - Letter templates
  - Diligent efforts

### Things we are thinking of for future meetings

- Attorneys at these meetings – how to get them here?
  - Might help if the Director issued the invitation for them – or Kirk.
  - A letter specifying what we would talk about and how it would benefit them.
- Collaboration with WF and CPS – we did this once before but it was mostly WF people that came, and the CPS folks didn't come – so there was no collaboration.
- Having folks hear from the trainers as to what is required when for workers.
- Domestic Violence folks talk about these issues
  - Women get a sliding scale for treatment and men cannot

- How you work with the offender, what if both parents want to come to CFTs together.
- Mental Health
  - Struggle trying to figure out what DSS needs to ask for from MH as far as trying to figure out if the issues are due to the parents MH or they are environmental/educational?
  - SA/MH – children placed out of the home, and parents don't have Medicaid so they can't get any insurance or financial assistance so they can't get treatment (you are supposed to be able to still use Medicaid if the placement is temporary but there is a wide range of definition about what is temporary – some counties as soon as the child is placed no matter for how long, the parents can't get it anymore).
- Some collaboration with Medicaid – discussion about.
- Looking at some creative funding sources – some counties do a better job of maximizing resources than others.
  - Holly went to a symposium with the Rural Success Project – according to outcomes rural counties are doing slightly better than most urban counties.
- Other ideas? Send to Holly.

#### Future Meetings:

Central: July 16<sup>th</sup> Davie County Mocksville Library

Eastern: July 18<sup>th</sup> Edgecombe County

Western: July 24<sup>th</sup> Here Again

August: No Meetings due to the Institute

Remainder of Western meetings at AB Tech

September - Friday 21<sup>st</sup>

October - Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup>

November - Friday 30<sup>th</sup>